




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR EVERTON

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HOUSING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MANDER** (Everton—LNP) (11.52 am): I rise to speak on the Housing Legislation Amendment Bill. In the first part of my contribution I want to refer to some of the comments that the minister made in her second reading speech, in particular her reference to the Housing Summit and the government announcements that have been made in the housing space. Today we have our third housing round table/summit and questions have to be asked and were asked today in question time: what are the real results of the Housing Summit? Today we heard that the government made a major significant announcement a couple of months ago about granny flats when the Deputy Premier said that thousands of Queenslanders would benefit from that. Today the Premier could not answer the question on how many extra people are in granny flats. The housing minister has been asked this before and she could not answer. As well as that, the Deputy Premier had been asked and none of them can point to a single person being housed under the so-called granny flat legislation.

Ms ENOCH: Mr Deputy Speaker Kelly, I rise to a point of order on relevance. The bill is very clearly about two particular items and I feel as though the member might be straying from that.

Mr MANDER: Just a point of clarification that might help, Mr Deputy Speaker?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): I will allow it.

Mr MANDER: Mr Deputy Speaker, I have the minister's speech in front of me where she has gone into some detail about the Housing Summit and the announcements that came out of the Housing Summit. I am simply referring to her own speech about the Housing Legislation Amendment Bill and having a counterview to what she has put forward.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will take some advice.

Ms PEASE: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. Already this morning Mr Speaker has spoken frequently about the correct use of titles and the member is not doing so and I ask that he be reminded to refer to members by their correct titles.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, I would give a general reminder to everyone to use correct titles please. I will take some advice. I will allow the member to continue because he is responding to statements made in an earlier speech, but I would ask you to at some point come back to the long title of the bill.

Mr MANDER: I will most definitely do that, Mr Deputy Speaker. We have had one of those significant announcements from the previous housing summits and we have had very little results. As well as that, the Griffith University accommodation was announced. On the original announcement there should have been people there a couple of weeks ago living in that accommodation of, I think it was, 250 units. From memory, from the original Housing Summit or just before that, the announcement was made that the Catholic Church was donating 90 properties. I have not heard one thing about the development of that very generous offer by the church.

We have heard about the Housing Investment Fund, and the minister continues to crow about that fund, but today again when asked in the parliament whether one single person had been housed from that fund that was announced two years ago we were told that construction still has not started on those north side projects at Redcliffe and Chermside. Another thing that came out of the Housing Summit was a so-called audit of state government land and houses which was announced on 1 December. We were told that it was going to be done in three months, yet it is now well past three months and we have seen no results from that audit. Then I think it was at the second round table that the minister announced that a retirement village at Clayfield would be housing people within two months, but the two months is up and there is no sign whatsoever that there will be people housed in that former retirement village anywhere in the near future.

Announcement after announcement after announcement from the housing summits have provided very little results. Then we have today's round table. I do not think there can be a greater example of contempt as has been displayed by this government towards the people coming to this housing round table today. It has been treated so insignificantly that it has been put on a parliamentary sitting day, squeezed into the lunch break. That is the first thing.

The second thing is that this morning this government made an announcement about tenancy changes without going to the housing round table to get its thoughts or opinions. The government is imposing its view on the round table, so it is just ticking a box and going through the motions once again. Somebody who is going to the round table has shown me how the government is engaging with people. It is engaging with people through a digital survey, so those people attending today are coming with three questions that they have to answer which are so inane and there has been no proper consultation or discussion about real issues. This is about ticking a box.

Today's announcement that is coming out of the housing round table comes from a week of chaos with regard to rents. The Premier said that there was going to be a rental cap. Whether that was a thought bubble or whether that was prearranged, no-one knows. Then we had the Deputy Premier coming out the next day and saying, 'Yes, there might be caps, but we'll cap it to CPI.' After the blowback from those who know how damaging those types of announcements would be to the economy, the Premier went on TV and said, 'No. The public misinterpreted what I said.'

Mr Langbroek: And went off on a tangent.

Mr MANDER: Yes, went off on a tangent. That is what the Premier said. Chaos, chaos, chaos: that is what we are seeing in this space with regard to trying to solve what is most definitely a housing crisis. The government continues to talk about the inroads it is making into addressing the current housing crisis. The minister addressed that in her speech.

Over the weekend I received an answer to a question on notice that asked how many social housing properties we have today compared to six years ago. In that period of time—in six years—the number of properties has only increased by three per cent, despite all the announcements that the government makes, despite the fact that the number of those on the housing waiting list has blown out by 60 to 70 per cent. It also is very concerning that in the Inala Housing Service Centre, which covers the Premier's electorate, there has been not one single extra social housing property in six years. The number that was there six years ago is the exact same number that was there on 1 January 2023.

Dr Rowan: Disgraceful!

Mr MANDER: Absolutely disgraceful. I will take that interjection. The stock is not being renewed. The number of properties that are 40 years old and over has increased by 38 per cent in the last six years. We do have a housing crisis. It is important that we have real policies that address this now, not in five years time. When I talk to community housing providers they talk about the now and the wow. All these statements about the future they put in the category of 'the wow': 'Wow, look at that.' What about now? What is happening right now to get people into houses?

We have a minister who is clearly out of her depth in this space. Let me give members an example. This week the minister was on radio and urged people who had a housing need to ring the housing hotline.

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Pause the clock. Members, there is too much interjection. I note there are several people out of their seats.

Mr MANDER: She urged people to ring the housing hotline if they were suffering from housing stress. The announcer asked the very obvious question, 'Okay, Minister, what is the hotline number?' She did not know the hotline number of her own department despite urging people to ring that number.

Mr Bailey interjected.

Mr MANDER: She could not provide it. It is absolutely embarrassing. You could not make this stuff up. At least the Treasurer said, 'Ring my electorate office'. I ask Queenslanders in housing stress to ring the Woodridge electorate office and see if the Treasurer can help you—because he cannot.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Pause the clock. Member for Miller, you are under a warning. Leave the chamber for an hour.

Whereupon the honourable member for Miller withdrew from the chamber at 12.03 pm.

Mr MANDER: We have had plenty of announcements, we have had plenty of bluster about what the government is doing, but the opposition continues to show that these announcements come to nothing. I have rattled off half a dozen examples already where they have made these empty promises and they cannot keep them. Yesterday the government made an announcement about the rapid build accommodation, the prefab homes. They are downsizing their ambitions in the next six months from what they originally announced. It is nothing short of an embarrassment.

We will not be opposing this bill because it is very uncontroversial. The reason it is not controversial is that there is not a heck of a lot of substance in it. As I have already mentioned, and we have seen it consistently not just in this term but over the last eight years, when it comes to housing and this government there is a lot of talk, a lot of rhetoric, plenty of announcements, but it is rarely ever matched with outcomes and the delivery which is promised. This Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 in some ways brings that point to the fore. It is no secret that we are in the middle of a housing crisis. We do not use the word 'crisis' lightly, but that is definitely what we have.

Mr Whiting: You use it all the time!

Mr MANDER: I will take the interjection. We use it all the time because we have a housing crisis, we have a hospital crisis and we have a youth crime crisis. This government lurches from crisis to crisis. There is nothing but chaos with this government. What people are looking for is stability and good decision-making and they are not getting it from this government. The interjection was very relevant and I thank the member for that interjection.

There are some people who simply cannot get a house. Some people have never experienced housing stress before. Some people are not able to afford their rent as the cost of living increases right across this state. They are trying to scrape together every cent they can to pay the rent. Some people have no place to live. It is important that we do everything that we can do. The government's own admission is that this piece of legislation is in response to the crisis which is unfolding in our suburbs and towns right across the length and breadth of this state. More to the point, the legislation is in part a response by the government to issues raised at the Housing Summit in October last year.

This bill amends the Housing Act 2003, the Housing Regulation 2015 and the Retirement Villages Act 1999. The amendments to the Housing Act and the Housing Regulation deal with the establishment of the Homes for Homes donation deed model in Queensland, which I will focus on first. As I have alluded to, bringing the Homes for Homes donation deed model to Queensland was 'a key action' of the *Queensland Housing Summit: outcomes report*. Again we have had another announcement, lots of press releases, but the tangible change in outcomes is limited. With the establishment of Homes for Homes in this legislation we need to have a mature and honest conversation about what it is reasonably likely to achieve. The opposition will not stand in the way of the Homes for Homes initiative which was raised at the Housing Summit. Homes for Homes is an organisation trying to do its bit to put a roof over people's heads and we, as the opposition, commend them for that. It is an independent, not-for-profit company that raises funds to provide social and affordable housing through people making a tax deductible 0.1 per cent donation from the sale of their property and was established by the social enterprise, the Big Issue.

I note the Community Support and Services Committee's report on the bill cited that Homes for Homes is operational in all Australian states and territories and has granted over \$1.28 million in funding for 13 projects in Victoria, Queensland, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory. Giving people the option to voluntarily make these donations is great, and we certainly will not stand in the way. However, as I said earlier, let us be honest and mature about the scale of donations that we can expect and subsequent investment which we are likely to see as a result of this legislation.

Everybody in Queensland is very aware of the cost-of-living pressures that we are all facing. Many individuals, couples and families are scratching together every last cent they can to put a deposit on their home, let alone making the ongoing repayments in the face of rocketing interest rates. As such, we are being realistic about how much money this is likely to raise, and we hope that the government is too. There is no getting around the fact that with less disposable income in the pockets of Queenslanders the likelihood of someone voluntarily making a donation under this model is reduced.

We have to be up-front about this initiative. It will not be the panacea for all the problems that I mentioned earlier that we have here in Queensland in regard to housing.

I want to stress that this is not a criticism of Homes for Homes and the work that they do. It is just a reality of the world in which we live where paying for the necessities like groceries, fuel, rent and mortgages is becoming increasingly more difficult. The reality is that the donations collected through the Homes for Homes model will be a drop in the ocean of what is needed given the sheer enormity of the housing crisis that Queensland is in the grips of. In her explanatory speech, when talking about the Homes for Homes initiative the minister said every bit helps and I agree. However, we are going to need a lot more than this to solve our housing crisis.

I note that the Community Support and Services Committee made three recommendations in relation to the Homes for Homes provision of the bill. The recommendations suggest some minor technical changes and clarifications along with ensuring that clear communication of any donation is voluntary. They are valid recommendations that the LNP supports. My fear is that, while the worthwhile establishment of Homes for Homes is a good thing, the government may try to sell it as some sort of silver bullet to work their way out of a political bind. The situation is far too dire for that so I implore those opposite not to peddle false hope but to get on with delivering.

I move on to address the components of the bill relating to the changes to the Retirement Villages Act. The explanatory notes for the bill cite the following objectives of the bill in relation to retirement villages—

1. Address limitations in the RV Act's existing provisions and regulation-making power for achieving the policy goal of more transparent, accountable, and consistent financial reporting
2. Improve financial transparency of village operations by increased access to financial documents
3. Strengthen public confidence in a financially transparent and accountable retirement village industry.

The government has stated that the amendments will increase access to particular village financial documents for village residents, the department and the public register for retirement villages. I will say from the get-go that the LNP appreciate that these amendments are well-intentioned but we do fear that there may be some unintended consequences associated with this proposal.

Although the intention of the bill is clear in improving transparency and compliance in financial reporting for retirement village operators, the LNP fear that the consequence of these amendments will be increased obligations and, therefore, costs for village operators. We all know what that means: it means that those costs are often passed on to residents and that is a concern that we have. There is a concern that smaller operators that previously may have been able to deal with financial reporting requirements internally will now have to engage external accounting services to meet the proposed requirements. Again, there is a cost associated with outsourcing work previously done in-house and it will be the residents who will have to pay for that.

It is important to bring some context to this debate in relation to the Retirement Villages Act. These amendments follow a string of consistent legislative changes brought on by issues identified in the act over recent years. The most recent amendment to the Retirement Villages Act, prior to this bill, was in the Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. Included in those amendments was an exemption for freehold resident operated retirement villages from existing statutory buyback requirements. I think, Mr Deputy Speaker, you will recall that very well. The issue was highlighted by LNP members in 2017 and 2019 respectively and yet on both occasions the government did not listen. We hope that these changes will not be a case of *deja vu*.

While the LNP will not oppose the amendments to the bill we take that position with some reservation due to change after change made to the Retirement Villages Act, which the government has overseen after amendments that it introduced proved to be unworkable in the past. The government must choose to implement these changes in a commonsense fashion. It cannot be burdensome and it has to be practical. We have to get the balance right. Every effort possible must be made to ensure that the implementation of these changes does not add to the cost of running villages—a cost that will be passed on to residents at a time when they can ill afford it.

Both the Property Council of Queensland and the Urban Development Institute of Australia highlighted their concerns, which we share. Both noted that, though well-intentioned, these amendments would likely lead to increasing obligations and costs for retirement village operators. Both groups shared their concern that those costs would likely be passed on to retirement village residents. The Property Council was particularly direct with their concerns, stating—

In the wake of the Housing Summit, the Government has stated that increasing housing affordability and availability is a top priority. The Bill appears to be counterintuitive to this priority ...

The LNP will closely monitor this situation with the hope that the government implements these changes sensibly so that retirees and pensioners are not forced to pay more in the middle of a cost-of-living crunch. We do not want to come back here again, as too often we have with the Retirement Villages Act, so fixing up these issues at the time of implementation is vital.

That is my contribution to the Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, which the LNP will be supporting. Whilst well-intentioned, these amendments will not make a significant difference to the housing crisis that we have. It is very important that this government responds quickly to those people who are desperate for a home and those who are desperately trying to pay their rent. The only way that the problem can be solved is by supplying more houses for those who want to buy a house, for those who want to be in affordable housing and for those who desperately need social housing. Until we have enough properties, this crisis will continue and, unfortunately, I cannot see it being solved in the near future.